

Bullock's Oriole *Icterus bullockii*



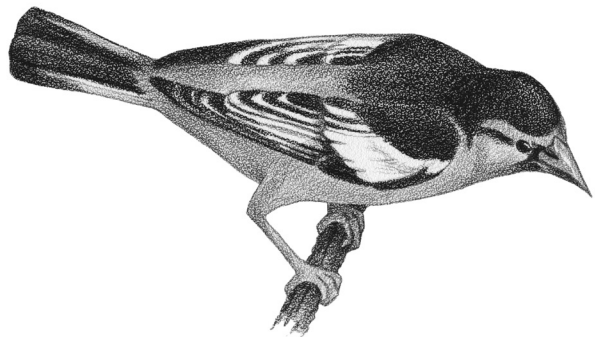
Folk Name: (none)
Status: Winter Visitor
Abundance: Casual
Habitat: Bird feeders

The Bullock's Oriole and the Baltimore Oriole are so closely related that for a time ornithologists considered them as different races of the same species. At that time, when a Bullock's was seen in the Carolinas, it was simply considered as the "very rare western form" of the Baltimore or "Northern" Oriole. Today, after a great deal of genetic study, taxonomists believe each to be a distinct species. The two have been officially "split" and each has been given a distinct species name or "specific epithet": Bullock's was designated *bullockii* in honor of William Bullock, the first person to collect one, and Baltimore was designated *galbula* which is Latin for "a small yellowish bird." This oriole is a casual western vagrant in our region.

The first two published reports of Bullock's Orioles from North Carolina were a small flock found in Morehead City from December 1959 through March 1960 and one bird found at a feeder in Southern Pines in 1974. Records of Bullock's Oriole in the state began "slowly multiplying" in the early 1980s. South Carolina's first Bullock's Oriole confirmed by photograph was an adult male found at a feeder at Hilton Head Island from February 4–12, 1992.

The first report of a Bullock's Oriole in the Central Carolinas came from Mrs. M.J. Barber, a seasoned local birder in Charlotte. Her sighting was published in the February 1979 issue of the Mecklenburg Audubon Society newsletter: "Gen Barber reports that she observed a Bullock's Oriole on January 10. She says that she saw this western species at close range for over 3 and a half hours." Unfortunately, no photograph of the bird has been preserved. It took 27 years for another Bullock's Oriole to be recorded in the Central Carolinas.

On January 14, 2006, Mary Ann McCree photographed an adult male visiting a feeder in Conover, Catawba County. Regrettably, this bird did not linger. Three years later, John Scavetto reported a male visiting a feeder in Stallings in Union County, NC, on February 1, 2009. On January 20, 2010, Ginger Walters noticed an unusual bird eating suet from her log feeder at her backyard feeder station in Cabarrus County near the Town of Davidson, NC. Ms. Walters quickly reported the bird, and it was



identified as a first-year male Bullock's Oriole. The bird stayed long enough to be seen and photographed by several observers.

In late December 2012, neighbors Alice Gavin and Noreen George spied an adult male Bullock's Oriole visiting their backyard feeder stations in the Sharon Hills area of Charlotte. The bird was photographed by Jeff Lemons on February 8, 2013, and remained there until at least 13 March. Ms. George had noticed what she believes was the same oriole visiting her feeders during the winter of 2011–2012, but had not recognized its rarity. She did not inform local birders about its existence until it had showed up again the following winter.



Bullock's Oriole in Charlotte. (Jeff Lemons)